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Chairman: Mr. Sharma ..... (Nepal)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.

Agenda item 119: Joint Inspection Unit (A/57/34, A/57/58 and Add.1, A/57/61, A/57/321, A/57/327 and A/57/434)

1. **Mr. Kuyama** (Chairman of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)) introduced the programme of work of JIU for 2002 (A/57/61), the preliminary listing of potential reports for the programme of work of JIU for 2003 and beyond (A/57/321), the annual report of JIU (A/57/34) and the report of JIU entitled "Enhancing governance oversight role: structure, working methods and practices on handling oversight reports" (A/57/58).

2. The Unit expected to have completed by the end of 2002 approximately 18 reports, including the 9 reports already completed, plus 3 notes. Of those 21 outputs, about two thirds had system-wide coverage. In the light of that heavy workload, the programme of work of the Unit for 2002 (A/57/61) contained only five new reports and one new note.

3. The preliminary listing of potential reports for the programme of work of the Unit for 2003 and beyond (A/57/321) had been prepared in conformity with paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 56/245, whereby JIU was invited to improve the presentation of the listing of potential reports for the following year and beyond by providing information on such points as the source, objectives and problems to be addressed and to present such information before the final quarter of each year. The listing was subject to change. The duration of the preparation of each potential report might vary from 6 to 12 months, depending on its scope and complexity. If included in the programme of work of the Unit for 2003, reports would, in principle, be initiated during the course of 2003 and be presented to the Assembly at its fifty-eighth or fifty-ninth sessions.

4. The annual report of JIU (A/57/34) had been prepared in accordance with paragraphs 7, 12 and 14 of resolution 56/245. In paragraph 7 of the resolution, the Unit was requested to consider including in its reports, where possible, the comments of the participating organizations on its findings and recommendations and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-seventh session. That request had provided JIU with a good opportunity for a review of the current practice with respect to the comments of the participating organizations and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). The delay in receiving the comments of CEB had been a major factor in preventing the timely consideration of JIU reports by the legislative organs. However, were the Unit to engage in a constructive exchange of views with participating organizations during the preparation process of its reports, CEB comments could be considered not to be absolutely necessary, based on article 11.4 (e) of the statute of the Unit. JIU had already prepared several reports using the approach just outlined. He was pleased to note that, in the case of the report on support costs related to extrabudgetary activities in organizations of the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2002/3), the experience had been a positive one. The Unit had been able to include in the final version of the report most of the comments made by participating organizations; reservations and dissenting views had been recorded in the annex to the report for the benefit of Member States. The report had generally been well received by the secretariats of the participating organizations. The General Assembly might therefore wish to accept, on a trial basis, the proposed new procedure, without prejudice to the provisions of article 11.4 of the statute of the Unit.

5. In paragraph 14 of resolution 56/245, the Unit was requested to submit, as part of its annual report, additional comments and recommendations on its experience with the system of follow-up to its reports. During the reporting period, JIU had continued its efforts to improve interaction with its participating organizations. It had concluded successful discussions with the secretariats of the Universal Postal Union, the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), with the subsequent endorsement of the respective legislative organs, on the modalities for the implementation of the JIU follow-up system. It had reached a basic understanding with the secretariats of three additional organizations during the same period and was in the process of completing a similar exercise with five more. The aim of those agreements was to increase the impact of the Unit's reports by enhancing the ability of the legislative organs to take specific action on the recommendations contained therein and the capacity of the secretariats to implement them. While some progress had been made in the participating organizations with which follow-up procedures had been agreed, additional effort would be

required in order to ensure that the procedures were fully implemented.

6. In paragraph 12 of resolution 56/245, the General Assembly welcomed the initial steps taken by JIU to intensify relations with other oversight bodies and requested the Unit to report to it thereon at its fifty-seventh session. In paragraph 15 of the resolution, the Assembly also decided to review the current state of coordination among the United Nations oversight bodies. In that connection, he was pleased to report that the Unit had organized a joint meeting with the Panel of External Auditors of the United Nations, taking advantage of their meeting held in Geneva in November 2001. At the meeting, JIU had submitted a proposal for the development of systematic cooperation and coordination among oversight bodies. In addition, the Unit had submitted two papers to the fifth tripartite oversight coordination meeting (with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the Board of Auditors) held in July 2002. It had also long been a practice of JIU to consult with the Office of Internal Oversight Services, and the two oversight bodies exchanged information on their respective programmes of work.

7. Turning to the report of JIU entitled "Enhancing governance oversight role: structure, working methods and practices on handling oversight reports" (A/57/58), he said that there was a growing interest on the part of the Member States in improving the governance of the organizations of the United Nations system. Governance of those organizations by the legislative organs was assured mainly through setting policies, programme objectives and strategies. Inseparably related to the governance function was the oversight responsibility of the legislative organs, which was a key aspect in ensuring that the human, financial and other resources made available were efficiently and effectively utilized, in the management by the secretariats, to achieve the policy directives and missions established for the organizations. The objective of the Unit's report was to contribute to enhancing the effectiveness and quality of the oversight role exercised by the legislative organs. To that end, it focused on the governance structure, working methods and practices of the legislative organs concerning oversight and on their procedures for handling reports prepared by oversight bodies. The report was especially timely: a number of the issues raised in the report of the Secretary-General on the strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change (A/57/387) were directly related to those covered in the JIU report. For example, the Secretary-General observed, in paragraph 164 of his report, that the existing systems for reporting and evaluating the performance of programmes had no practical impact on future plans and resource allocation decisions; that situation had constituted the rationale for a number of the recommendations made in the JIU report.

8. The members of CEB had appreciated the JIU report's analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the oversight activities of legislative organs. However, while the Unit's recommendations had been accepted in principle, some had met with mixed reactions. In his view, certain comments made by the secretariats of participating organizations were simply a defence of the status quo. He noted, in that connection, that most of the recommendations had been endorsed by those legislative organs which had considered them.

9. With the exception of recommendation 4, the Unit's recommendations were addressed to the legislative organs, rather than the Executive Heads. Recommendation 1 presented a modus operandi for enhancing the effectiveness of the oversight functions exercised by the legislative organs. The practice of the Fifth Committee already met the criteria set out in paragraphs (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the recommendation, but the situation with respect to the other Main Committees was far from satisfactory. Paragraph (e) concerned secretariat compliance with approved oversight recommendations. In general, the prevailing situation was not satisfactory, although the practice of such organizations as the United Nations Children's Fund, which had submitted a report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors to the General Assembly through the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, was relatively good.

10. In recommendation 2, it was suggested that legislative organs might wish to adopt measures to rationalize or strengthen governance structures. He noted that, in some specialized agencies, Member States lacked expert advice on administrative and budgetary issues. It was therefore suggested, in paragraph (d), that legislative organs could be assisted by small expert advisory bodies.

11. In recommendation 3, legislative organs were encouraged, in the interests of efficiency, effectiveness

and economy in governance oversight, to review certain questionable practices, including the payment of travel and subsistence allowance to delegates. As demonstrated in table 2 of the annex to the report, governance costs in such organizations as UNESCO and the International Labour Organization were not negligible.

12. In the case of the United Nations Secretariat, recommendation 4 could be expanded to include consolidated reporting by the Secretary-General on the implementation of the recommendations of all oversight bodies. He noted, in that connection, that consolidating reports on similar subjects was one of the measures proposed by the Secretary-General in his report on strengthening of the United Nations (A/57/387). Some organizations were already moving in that direction. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization, for example, had recently established a tracking system to follow up all recommendations made by internal and external oversight bodies. JIU believed that consolidated reporting would facilitate the identification of areas in which major management weaknesses existed, as well as highlight the efforts of secretariats to remedy those shortcomings. It would, in addition, encourage secretariats to address oversight recommendations from a systemic perspective; that had been one of the objectives of the Secretary-General in establishing the Accountability Panel. One of the two papers submitted by JIU to the fifth tripartite oversight coordination meeting was entitled "Consolidated reporting by the Secretary-General on the implementation of all oversight recommendations". The participants in that meeting had agreed to submit a specific proposal on the matter to the Secretary-General in due course.

13. **Mr. Sevilla** (Secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination CEB)), introducing the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the comments of CEB on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Enhancing governance oversight role: structure, working methods and practices on handling oversight reports" (A/57/58/Add.1), said that comments on the report from the members of CEB had clearly shown that they considered the oversight functions of legislative bodies within the organizations of the United Nations system to be an important issue. Those organizations had differing oversight procedures, practices and costs and the members of CEB had therefore particularly appreciated the analytical content of the report, which adopted a system-wide perspective, encouraged a review of existing arrangements and policies, and emphasized the linkage between legislative oversight, on the one hand, and policy formulation, programme planning, budgeting and improvement of management and accountability, on the other. The members of CEB had, however, expressed doubts about a number of the recommendations.

14. They had not objected in principle to recommendation 1, which proposed linking the review of oversight reports with programming, policy setting and administrative, budgetary and financial matters, but they had pointed out that existing mechanisms were already being used, or would be used, to achieve that end. They had been concerned that the modus operandi suggested in recommendation 1 (a), namely that the review of oversight reports should be linked to substantive items on the agendas of the legislative organs, might conflict with those organs' established practices, involve them in too much detail, take too much time for discussion, and require a single oversight issue to be taken up under various agenda items, which would be impractical.

15. Most organizations had taken exception to the suggestion in recommendation 2 that, in applying the modus operandi proposed in recommendation 1, efforts should be made to consolidate, convert or streamline existing governance structures in order to rationalize or strengthen them. They considered that the composition, authority and terms of reference of their governance structures were adequate.

16. The members of CEB had not supported recommendation 3 (a), which proposed a review of the numerical composition of the "executive" legislative organs and/or their subsidiary committees. They had argued that the membership and composition of existing oversight structures were adequate, appropriate and effective, or that altering the composition of those legislative organs would be constitutionally difficult and very sensitive. At least one organization had suggested that consensus building should instead be pursued through more informal interaction with member States prior to meetings of the legislative organs.

17. The members of CEB had also not supported recommendation 3 (b), which proposed a review of the expertise and experience to be required of members of

the "executive" legislative organs and/or their subsidiary committees, on the grounds that existing rules and decisions relating to membership of those legislative organs already required appropriate expertise and/or experience. They had pointed out that it was the prerogative of member States to determine the composition of their delegations to legislative organs.

18. The members of CEB had felt that recommendation 3 (c), which proposed a review of the frequency and duration of the sessions of legislative bodies, was unnecessary, as many organizations had already taken action on that matter in consultation with their member States. They had, moreover, not considered recommendation 3 (d), which proposed a review of the travel and subsistence allowance paid to delegates, because there were a number of existing rules on the matter.

19. Recommendation 4, which called for summaries of relevant oversight report recommendations and follow-up action to be included in individual sections of the programme budget, had drawn broad support. Several organizations had pointed out that their own procedures for handling oversight reports already implemented the recommendation in various ways. At least one organization had objected to the recommendation on the grounds that implementing it would add to the time needed to prepare and discuss budget matters.

20. As their comments had shown, the members of CEB had welcomed the inspector's careful consideration of the legislative oversight structure, working methods and practices, and the information collected in the report, which brought out the strengths and weaknesses of the current arrangements. They were already taking action to improve the oversight functions of their legislative organs, but believed that the JIU recommendations were not sufficiently comprehensive or responsive to the requirements of their organizations for system-wide implementation.

21. **Ms. Ferrera-Mahmud** (Oversight Support Unit, Department of Management), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/57/327), said that the report, which was submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 2924 B (XXVII) and General Assembly resolution 44/184 included detailed information on four JIU reports.

22. The JIU report entitled "Coordination at Headquarters and at the field level between United Nations agencies involved in peace-building: an assessment of possibilities" (A/52/430) and the related comments of the Secretary-General and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) (A/52/430 and Add.1) had been considered under several thematic debates on the topic in the Security Council. A framework for a comprehensive and integrated strategy in peace-building had then been developed and the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs had been given the role of focal point for peace-building matters.

23. The JIU report entitled "Fellowships in the United Nations system" (A/53/154), together with the comments of the Secretary-General and ACC, had been considered by various legislative bodies in the United Nations system, including the Second Committee of the General Assembly during the fifty-third session. The objective of the report was to identify major management and coordination issues relating to the implementation of the United Nations system fellowship programmes, and their contribution to capacity-building. The inspectors had concluded that the organizations of the United Nations system should adopt a uniform reporting format based on a common definition of fellowships, focusing on quality, relevance and impact, and it had called for measures to foster the use of former fellows' expertise.

24. The JIU report entitled "The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)" (A/53/788), together with the comments of ACC (A/53/788/Add.1) had been submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session and had also been considered by various legislative bodies in the United Nations system, including the Executive Board of UNESCO which had welcomed the sharing of UNOPS expertise and experience in the area of procurement in general and, in particular, in its practice and procedure in emergency situations.

25. The JIU report entitled "More coherence for enhanced oversight in the United Nations system" (A/53/171) provided a comparative assessment of oversight mechanisms used within the United Nations system. The report had been introduced in the Fifth Committee and had then been considered by the

Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC), which had expressed appreciation for the analysis and reference information, considering it readable, informative and timely. However, only recommendations 5 and 6 had been supported without reservation.

26. The Secretariat continued to attach a high priority to the timely and comprehensive implementation of JIU recommendations approved by the General Assembly, and was working with JIU to develop new and improved methods of reporting on their implementation.

27. **Ms. Nakian** (United States of America) reiterated the importance her delegation attached to effective oversight mechanisms in the United Nations system. Those mechanisms had produced many measures to improve efficiency, effectiveness and productivity, but much remained to be done. A combined effort was needed with direction from Executive Heads and the participation of legislative organs and Member States. It was not enough to identify areas for improvement: recommendations had to be targeted, realistic and implemented in a timely manner. To that end, oversight reports needed to be geared to the genuine needs of the participating organizations, and that was an area in which her delegation believed that JIU could improve its approach. Many JIU reports and recommendations were too broad and lacked proposals for action, or repeated conclusions already drawn in other reports. Many JIU recommendations came too late and were already being implemented by the time they were made. External and internal oversight bodies accordingly needed to avoid duplication by coordinating and sharing data.

28. Her delegation hoped that future JIU reports would be less academic and more focused on action to improve productivity and efficiency. Some of the potential reports listed in the work programme of JIU for 2003 were worth pursuing, but others were too broad, and beyond the resources and capabilities of the Unit. It would be useful to study United Nations mandates to evaluate relevance and effectiveness, and to assess how well the United Nations implemented the existing Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation.

29. Her delegation had been dismayed to learn that the rate of success in implementing oversight recommendations, particularly those of JIU, was limited. That had been due in part to the broad nature of many JIU recommendations, but also in part to the failure of some legislative bodies, including the Fifth Committee, to fulfil follow-up expectations. The General Assembly had taken specific action on eight JIU reports, but other legislative bodies had not even considered many JIU reports. Steps should be taken to ensure that reports were submitted to the legislative bodies of participating organizations for consideration. Certain legislative bodies also needed to improve oversight structures and practices; because of their specialized and technical nature, some organizations had tended to set aside oversight issues.

30. She welcomed the efforts made by JIU to find ways to track the implementation of recommendations and to help to ensure that oversight activities eventually led to improved policies, programmes and management processes. Currently, many findings and recommendations were not linked to policy, programme planning, budgeting, management improvement and accountability.

31. In resolution 52/220 the General Assembly requested that the individual sections of the programme budget contain a summary of the relevant recommendations of the internal and external oversight bodies and information on the follow-up action taken for each recommendation. Although her delegation was pleased to note that the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 contained such information, it was dismayed that many other participating organizations had found that request inappropriate or unworkable.

32. More information on productivity and efficiency efforts would be welcome. The scaled-down work programme of JIU for 2002 should be reflected in more targeted, detailed and action-oriented reports, that avoided redundancy with other oversight bodies. Her delegation looked forward to receiving information on the progress of the work programme.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.